

Message Text

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CIEP-02 LAB-06 SIL-01 OMB-01 DOTE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION USNATO

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

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AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PARIS 19216

1. SUMMARY. FOUR MONTHS AFTER THE MARCH LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, SALIENT FEATURES OF FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICS INCLUDE: (A) A SENSE THAT MESSMER GOVERNMENT IS DRIFTING, REACTING TO RATHER THAN INITIATING EVENTS -- EXCEPT IN DEFENSE AND FOREIGN POLICY AREAS WHICH REMAIN FIRMLY UNDER ELYSEE CONTROL; (B) BICKERING AND BACK-BITING BUT NO SIGN OF SERIOUS RUPTURE AMONG MAJORITY COALITION PARTIES; (C) SCRAMBLE FOR POSITION BY MAJOR AND SOME MINOR PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS. FIRST SESSION OF NEW ASSEMBLY ENDED JULY 3 AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY LIKELY TO DIMINISH, AS USUAL, TO NEAR-ZERO THROUGH THE VACATION PERIOD. LONGER-RANGER GOV DIRECTION IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND ALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL FORCES SHOULD BECOME CLEARER AFTER THE
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FALL RENTREE. BOTH WILL DEPEND IN LARGE PART ON PRESIDENT POMPIDOU'S HEALTH AND ABILITY FULLY TO EXERCISE PRESIDENTIAL AUTHORITY. END SUMMARY

2. PRESIDENT POMPIDOU'S POOR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE DURING THE PAST FEW MONTHS AND RUMORS THAT HIS HEALTH IS SERIOUSLY DECLINING PROLONGED SHAKE-DOWN PERIOD FOR NEW GOVERNMENT AND ASSEMBLY, INTENSIFIED RIVALRIES WITHIN THE MAJORITY COALITION AND GENERATED INTENSE JOCKEYING AMONG CONTENDERS FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION. THE PRESIDENT HAS TAKEN FIRM MEASURES TO COMBAT ALLEGED LAME-DUCK STATUS BASED ON INCESSANT RUMORS THAT HE COULD NOT LONG CONTINUE IN OFFICE. ALTHOUGH HE CANCELLED APPEARANCES AT SEVERAL PUBLIC RECEPTIONS, HE MAINTAINED VIGOROUS SCHEDULE OF APPOINTMENTS AND TRAVEL DURING MAY AND JUNE. MOREOVER, HE SPREAD THE WORD THROUGH WELL-INFORMED SOURCES THAT HIS TENTATIVE PLAN IS TO RUN FOR PRESIDENCY AGAIN IN 1976. MOST IMPORTANTLY, HE HAS LOOKED FITTER IN RECENT PUBLIC APPEARANCES. IF AFTER REST DURING THE SUMMER POMPIDOU IS ABLE TO RESUME NORMAL ACTIVITIES THIS FALL, INCLUDING SCHEDULED TRIP TO CHINA IN SEPTEMBER, HE SHOULD HAVE NO DIFFICULTY REASSERTING FULL AUTHORITY, BOTH PERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL, OVER FRENCH POLITICS.

3. IN ANY EVENT, DURING PAST FOUR MONTHS, POMPIDOU'S COMMAND OF MAJOR PRESIDENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES NEVER SLACKENED, I.E., THE AREAS OF FOREIGN POLICY, DEFENSE, INTERNATIONAL FINANCE AND TRADE. FOREIGN MINISTER JOBERT HAS, AS EXPECTED, PROVED AN UNSWERVING EXPONENT OF PRESIDENT POMPIDOU'S FOREIGN POLICY. JOBERT'S DEDICATION TO POMPIDOU LINE IS MATCHED BY ROBERT GALLEY, MINISTER OF ARMED FORCES. GALLEY HAS NEITHER THE PRESTIGE NOR THE POLITICAL CLOUT OF HIS PREDECESSOR, MICHEL DEBRE, AND, WHILE THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE DEBRE DISAGREED IN ANY IMPORTANT WAY WITH POMPIDOU ON DEFENSE, EVEN THE POSSIBILITY OF DEVIATION FROM THE ELYSEE DEFENSE LINE HAS VANISHED WITH GALLEY'S APPOINTMENT. FINANCE MINISTER GISCARD D'ESTAING ENJOYS POWERFUL AND SOMEWHAT INDEPENDENT POSITION WITHIN GOVERNMENT BUT BASICALLY AGREES WITH POMPIDOU'S APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL FINANCE AND TRADE.

4. ON PURELY DOMESTIC SIDE, UNDER PRIME MINISTER MESSMER'S TECHNICALLY COMPETENT BUT POLITICALLY COLORLESS DIRECTION, THE CONFIDENTIAL

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GOVERNMENT HAS APPEARED TO REACT TO RATHER THAN INITIATE DEBATE ON MAJOR ISSUES WHICH HAVE SURFACED SINCE THE ELECTIONS, I.E., DEMAND FOR LIBERALIZATION OF ABORTION LAW, DEBATE ON MILITARY DEFERMENTS, QUESTIONS OF WORKER-EMPLOYER RELATIONS, AND INFLATION. GOVERNMENT REACTION TO THESE ISSUES HAS IN MOST CASES REFLECTED DEEP-SEATED CONSERVATIVE BIAS. DEFENSE MINISTER GALLEY, INTERIOR MINISTER MARCELLIN, CULTURAL MINISTER DRUON AND EVEN MORE PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION MINISTER FONTANET HAVE ALL SHUNNED NEW IDEAS AND APPROACHES HAVE BEEN OUTSPOKENLY CRITICAL OF STUDENT AND LEFTIST MILITANTS, AND HAVE BEEN CONSISTENTLY SEVERE IN DEALING WITH DISSIDENT GROUPS. GISCARD D'ESTAING HAS BEEN SLOW IN APPROVING WELFARE AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURES, AND COMMERCE MINISTER ROYER HAS CHAMPIONED CONSERVATIVE INTERESTS OF SMALL SHOPKEEPERS AND

ARTISANS. THERE IS INDICATION, HOWEVER, THAT MESSMER MAY NOW BELIEVE GOVERNMENT HAS VEERED TOO FAR TO THE RIGHT. IN RECENT SPEECHES HE RENEWED COMMITMENT TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REFORMS HE PROMISED DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGN. HOWEVER, HIS RECENT PLEDGE THAT THESE REFORMS WILL ONLY BE ENACTED INTO LAW DURING THE LIFE OF THE CURRENT ASSEMBLY, THAT IS BY 1978, REDUCED IMPACT IF NOT CREDIBILITY OF GOF COMMITMENT TO REFORM. (DURING CAMPAIGN, IMPLICATION WAS THAT REFORMS WOULD BE ENACTED IMMEDIATELY.) MAIN INTERNAL PROBLEM GOF WILL FACE THIS FALL

L
LIKELY TO BE RECONCILING DEMAND FOR INCREASED SPENDING ON SOCIAL PROGRAMS WITH NEED TO CONTROL INFOATION. THUS FAR, GOF ANTI-INFLATION MEASURES HAVE NOT BEEN SEVERE BUT MESSMER HAS THREATENED TAX INCREASES TO RECONCILE A BALANCED BUDGET WITH EXPENDITURES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL WELFARE.)

5. THE BALANCE SHEET FOR THE FIRST SESSION OF THE NEW ASEEMBLY IS NOT IMPRESSIVE. TWENTY-SIX LAWS WERE ENACTED, INCLUDING CHANGE IN MILITARY DEFERMENT LAW, REFORM OF SEXUAL EDUCATION AND LIMITATION ON EMPLOYERS' RIGHT TO FIRE EMPLOYEES WITHOUT CAUSE. BUT NONE OF THE LAWS DEALT WITH THE OVER-HAUL OF FRENCH SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM PROMISED DURING THE CAMPAIGN. IN FACT, THE MOST PASSIONATELY-DISCUSSED ISSUE DURING THE SESSION WAS THE GOVERNMENT'S IMPOSITION OF 100-KILOMETER AN HOUR SPEED LIMIT ON ALL BUT FRANCE'S SUPER HIGHWAYS. ASSEMBLY DEBATES ON FOREIGN POLICY, DEFENSE, WIRE TAPPING AND CIVIL RIGHTS ROSE ONLY OCCASIONALLY ABOVE MUNDANE AND FAILED TO
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CAPTURE GENERAL PUBLIC INTEREST. ATTENDANCE AT ASSEMBLY SESSIONS WAS EVEN MORE SPOTTY THAN IN PREVIOUS YEARS. HOPES GENERATED DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGN THAT AN ASSEMBLY MORE EVENLY BALANCED BETWEEN MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION WOULD PLAY A LARGER ROLE IN DETERMINING GOF POLICY WERE NOT REALIZED. EVEN UNDER ASSEMBLY PRES-IDENT EDGAR FAURE'S MORE DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP, THE ASSEMBLY, WITH ITS ABBREVIATED SESSIONS, ITS LACK OF POWER OVER THE PURSE STRINGS AND ITS INABILITY TO SUPERVISE IN ANY MEANINGFUL WAY MINISTERIAL ACTIVITIES, REMAINS AN ANEMIC INSTITUTION TOTALLY OVERSHADOWED BY THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH.

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RSR-01 /178 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PARIS 19216/2

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICS: MESSMER II GOVERNMENT EN RODAGE

6. WITHIN THE ASSEMBLY, VOTING UNITY OF MAJORITY COALITION PARTIES HELD ON ALL BUT ONE ISSUE: INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS JOINED THE OPPOSITION IN DEFEATING A UDR MOTION TO REFER PROPOSED CHANGES IN ABORTION LAW TO A SPECIAL STUDY COMMITTEE. THIS MINOR BREAK IN RANKS UNDERSCORED UDR DEPENDENCE ON THE IR'S TO MAINTAIN MAJORITY. IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, THE THREE COALITION PARTIES STAYED IN HARNESS AND ARE EXPECTED TO REMAIN UNITED IN THE ASSEMBLY ON ALL MAJOR ISSUES
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FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

7. POST-ELECTION PERIOD PROVED, HOWEVER, THAT UNITY OF THE MAJORITY COALITION PARTIES RESULTS FROM MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE, NOT LOVE. UDR SPOKESMEN HAVE BEEN VIRULENT IN RECENT ATTACKS IN GISCARD D'ESTAING. THEY RESENT HIS POPULARITY AND FEAR HE MAY ALREADY HAVE INSIDE TRACK IN THE PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION RACE. UDR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ALEXANDRE SANGUINETTI, WHO HAS BECOME THE PARTY'S PRINCIPAL SPOKESMAN AND HATCHET MAN, HAS PUBLICLY SAID THAT THE UDR WILL SUPPORT ONLY A GAULLIST FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF POMPIDOU DECLINES TO RUN IN 1976. SANGUINETTI MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE UDR'S CHOICE AS OF NOW IS FORMER PRIME MINISTER CHABAN-DELMAS. RECENT OPINION POLLS PROVIDE KEY TO BOTH UDR CONCERN AND STEPPED-UP CANDIDATE MANEUVERING

WHEN ASKED WHICH OF A NUMBER
OF MAJORITY COALITION POLITICAL LEADERS HAS
THE BEST FUTURE, 63PERCENT OF THOSE QUESTIONED NAMED GISCARD,
WHILE 40PERCENT NAMED CHABAN-DELMAS. HOWEVER, WHEN VARIOUS
CANDIDATES ARE PITTED AGAINST THE MOST LIKELY LEFT-WING CANDIDATE,
PS SECRETARY-GENERAL FRANCOIS MITTERRAND, THE RESULTS ARE AS FOLLOWS:
(A) POMPIDOU, 55PERCENT; MITTERRAND, 30PERCENT; UNDECIDED, 15PERCENT.
(B) CHABAN-DELMAS, 51PERCENT; MITTERRAND, 31PERCENT; UNDECIDED,
18PERCENT. (C) GISCARD D'ESTAING, 51PERCENT;
MITTERRAND, 31PERCENT; UNDECIDED, 18PERCENT. THUS, IF POMPIDOU
DOES NOT RUN, CHABAN AND GISCARD AT PRESENT APPEAR TO HAVE EQUALLY
GOOD CHANCE OF WINNING INSOFAR AS AN OPINION POLL TAKEN THREE YEARS
BEFORE THE EVENT HAS ANY VALIDITY.

8. PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS WILL CERTAINLY CONTINUE TO SEEK THE LIME-
LIGHT AND BUILD SUPPORT DURING THE COMING MONTHS AND IT IS FAR FROM
CLEAR WHO WILL REPRESENT THE GOVERNMENT COALITION IN 1976. IN
ADDITION TO CHABAN AND GISCARD, PRIME MINISTER MESSMER IS A STRONG
CONTENDER AND ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT EDGAR FAURE MUST BE REGARDED AS
A POTENTIAL CANDIDATE. OTHER LESS LIKELY BUT POSSIBLE CANDIDATES
FROM MAJORITY ARE AGRICULTURE MINISTER JACQUES CHIRAC AND MINISTER
OF ARMED FORCES ROBERT GALLEY, AND BETWEEN NOW AND 1976 ENTIRELY
NEW CANDIDATES COULD, OF
COURSE, SURFACE.

9. NOR IS IT CERTAIN THAT FRANCOIS MITTERRAND WILL BE THE ONLY LEFT
STANDARD-BEARER IN THE RPRESIDENTIAL RACE. THE SOCIALIST-COMMUNIST
ALLIANCE REMAINS FRAGILE AND THE PCF MAY DECIDE TO FIELD A FIRST-
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ROUND CANDIDATE. I THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, HOWEVER, WE EXPECT
THE SOCIALISTS AND THE COMMUNISTS WILL MAINTAIN THEIR SOMEWHAT UN-
EASY ALLIANCE. EACH PARTY, HHWEVER, WILL SPARE NO EFFORTS TO
INCREASE ITS SIZE AND INFLUENCE AND REAFFIRM ITS AUTONOMY,
EVEN AT THE PRICE OF RECIPROCAL IRRITATION AND HEIGHTENED SUSPICION
OF THE OTHER'S MOTIVES (SEE PARIS' T-17858 OF JUNE 29).

10. THE OTHER MAJOR OPPOSITION GROUP, THE CENTRIST MOVEMENT FOR
REFORM, SHOWS SERIOUS SIGNS OF STRAIN. SSECRETARY-GENERAL OF
THE RADICAL PARTY NICHOLS MALOUMIAN RECENTLY TOLD AN EMBASSY
OFFICER THAT JEAN LECANUET'S CENTER DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND JEAN-
JACQUES SERVAN-SCHREIBER'S RADICAL PARTY WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY
SPLIT IN THE RELATIVELY NEAR FUTURE. MALOUMIAN SAID THE ONLY REASON
THEY WERE STILL TOGETHER IN THE MOVEMENT FOR REFORM IS THAT NEITHER
WANTS TO BEAR THE ONUS FOR BREAKING UP THE ONLY OPPOSITION CENTER
GROUP. MALOUMIAN SAID HE BELIEVES LECANUET AND AT LEAST PART OF
HIS GROUP WILL RALLY TO THE GOVERNMENT, PERHAPS BY JOINING FORCES
WITH THE SMALLEST OF THE THREE MAJORITY COALITION PARTIES, THE
DUHAMEL-FONTANET CENTER UNION. BUT, HE ADDED, THE RADICAL PARTY,
ALONG WITH ALL OTHER LEFT-OF-CENTER ELEMENTS IN THE REFORM MOVEMENT,
WILL STAY IN THE OPPOSITION THOUGH OUTSIDE THE UNITED LEFT.
THE EFFECT OF A SPLIT WITHIN THE CENTER

OPPOSITION ALLIANCE IS LIABLE TO BE NEGLIGIBLE IN THE ASSEMBLY SINCE ITS STRENGTH DOES NOT PERMIT IT THE PIVOTAL ROLE BETWEEN LEFT AND RIGHT THE MOVEMENT FOR REFORM WAS DESIGNED TO PLAY. IN THE LONGER RUN,

OF COURSE, THE VOTES OF THE VARIOUS CENTER PARTY SUPPORTERS COULD BE CRUCIAL TO THE OUTCOME OF THE 1976 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIOS.

11. COMMENT: WHILE MUCH OF THE POLITICAL EFFERVESCENCE THAT MARKS THE CURRENT INTERNAL SCENE IS RELATED TO THE FORTHCOMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, IT IS FAR TOO EARLY, IN OUR VIEW, TO FORM EVEN THE MOST PRELIMINARY JUDGMENTS ABOUT THE 1976 CAMPAIGN. MAJOR UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ARE WHETHER POMPIDOU INTENDS TO RUN AGAIN AND, IF NOT, WHO IS CHOICE FOR SUCCESSOR WILL BE. AND DESPITE HITS HE PLANS TO RUN AGAIN, THERE IS NO REAL EVIDENCE THE PRESIDENT HAS MADE UP HIS MIND ON EITHER QUESTION.

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